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**RWANDA**



## SUCCESS STORY

### Parents talk to their children about HIV/AIDS



***The Witegereza (“Don’t wait”) campaign encourages parents to talk to their children about sexual health. Starting in November 2007, billboards across Rwanda emphasized the need to educate youth about HIV/AIDS and reinforced the messages taught to adults and youth in the trainings supported by PEPFAR.***



***Mother and son at the closing ceremony for “Parent-Child Communication” training***

In Rwanda, 67 percent of the population is under the age of 20 and approximately two in five people report becoming sexually active before age 20. While nearly all young adults in Rwanda have heard of AIDS, less than 50 percent of 15- to 19-year-olds have an in-depth understanding of the disease. “It isn’t our culture to speak openly with our children about sexuality” said Munyeshuri, the father of Clement. Historically, Rwandan youth learned about sensitive topics from the extended family – from aunts and uncles for example. With the breakdown of the nuclear and extended family in post-genocide Rwanda, parents and caregivers feel hesitant and ill-equipped to discuss sexual and reproductive health with their children, leaving youth dependent on sometimes unreliable sources of information like their friends or, increasingly, the internet.

With funding from the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and in collaboration with Rwanda’s National AIDS Commission (CNLS), Population Services International (PSI) began training secondary students and their parents how to talk openly about the sensitive issues of sexual and reproductive health. This training program is operating under the banner of the “WITEGEREZA” or “Don’t Wait” integrated media campaign designed to “break the silence” in parent-child communication about sex.

Since 2006, 942 students and their parents have completed the training. Every person participates in five sessions that are designed to breakdown communication barriers and encourage safe behavior. Upon completion of the training, these students and parents become role models in their communities, passing on the information and methods they have learned to their peers who also feel nervous talking about these sensitive issues.

“Before the sessions I did not even say the word “sex” in the house – it is not in our culture,” commented Bernadette, a mother of four living in Kigali. “Now I am not only a mother but also a friend to my kids and more confident that they are making good choices.”

Improved communication about HIV/AIDS between parents and children helps to limit unsafe sexual behavior and reduces the risk of HIV infection.